

# Study Abroad: My Journey



*My favourite view of Berlin's skyline.*

It only hit me in the car to the airport that I'd never flown on my own before. I was about to begin my year abroad in Berlin, somewhere I'd never visited, where I knew no one, and I didn't speak the language. I didn't even have a place to live when I arrived; I had booked a hostel room for a week to give me time to find a flat. Looking back on that fear is a great feeling. Being thrown in at the deep end marked the beginning of my study abroad journey.

Nobody tells you the real benefits of studying abroad; you only realise it for yourself during your time away. But the fact is, if you spend any time living abroad you will come back a changed person in many ways. For me, studying abroad helped me to overcome my natural shyness, and being pushed out of my comfort zone helped me to gain confidence. Once you've been forced to give a ten-minute presentation in German during a heatwave, you feel like you can conquer any situation! I also discovered a lot about myself that I didn't know, like when being dragged to a Berlin techno club for the first time sparked a love of electronic music that I've never gotten over.

Of course, there were a lot of differences between living in Germany and living in Leeds to get used to. One of most difficult to adjust to was the fact that German women do not dress up, *ever*. Make-up is always kept to an absolute minimum, which felt like a big change. Even in clubs, most Germans wear casual clothing and trainers. Likewise, you would never see people charging onto the underground trains wearing suits like we see in the UK. But after a while, I came to appreciate this relaxed attitude and outlook on life; mornings were certainly less stressful.

Don't get me wrong, studying abroad is not a breeze. You will inevitably feel homesick. The moment that the potential landlord of the flat I was viewing stared creepily at me and told me what pretty eyes I had was definitely not one of the highlights of my year (needless to say I left quickly). For me, the hardest part was returning home. A lot of people experience this form of reverse culture-shock they warn you about, though you never think it will happen to you. But adjusting to your old life back in Leeds can be hard when you've become used to a new way of living. You will definitely end up being one of *those* people who talk about your travels constantly.

However, all these aspects of your year abroad add up to make what will be one of the most eventful, unforgettable, life-changing experiences you'll ever have. I cannot recommend studying abroad enough to anyone who is given the opportunity, especially if you're shy like me. Your year abroad will be a personal journey, so that when you return home, you've not just boosted your employability, but gained confidence and life-experience that will help you achieve your goals. You'll also make lifelong friends from all over the world.

Personally, the benefits of studying abroad were so great that I hope to study my masters abroad next year; next stop, Amsterdam!

**Megan Smith**

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